754 Sea Islanders NN23
756
●791

[For information on "root doctors", see Category 759.]

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

FROGTOWN AND CURRYTOWN

I know folks right now dat kin make duh spirits uh dead people come back.[56]

"Wen I wuz jis growin up I knowd a boy dat hab a strange powuh. Eben ef he wuzn wid duh udduh boys he could tell each one wut he bin doin.[22a,*] One day attuh we grown up he say dat he could bring back folks dat hab lef town an gone away.

"Now deah wuz a uhmun whose huzbun hab lef uh. Dis uhmun wuz jis frettin uhsef tuh det. Muh frien go tuh uh an say, 'I will cause yuh huzbun tuh come back tuh yuh. I will chahge yuh ten dolluhs. Yuh needn pay me till he come back, but ef yuh dohn pay me den, he wohn stay.'

"In a week's time duh uhmun's huzbun wuz back. He stay home till he die. Duh uhmun pay muh frien in piece payments till she pay im duh ten dolluhs."

Living in a dirt lane on the fringe of Currytown is Chloe West * who was born at White Bluff and cannot remember her exact age. She told us that she frequently sees ghosts [59] and that a spirit warns her when anything out of the ordinary is about to happen.[22a,*]

"One time I wuz bodduhed by duh folks nex doe wut wuz tryin tuh cunjuh me. Somebody tell me tuh git some hot watuh an tro it wen I heah duh noise. Jis as I git duh watuh hot, duh spirit ub a wite uhmun I use tuh wuk fuh peahed an tell me tuh pray an duh witches would go way. Attuh she spoke, duh witches went out an nebuh did bodduh me since. Duh witches wuz two men. One ub um went crazy an duh poeleece foun duh udduh one out in duh woods. He died in duh po house.

"One night I heah a noise at muh winduh. A voice say, 'Chloe, dohn go neah duh winduh.' I stop a minute, den uh go tuh duh winduh. Some kine uh powduh wuz trone in muh face dat bline me.[8b] Den duh voice tell me tuh wash muh

* *Chloe West, 625 West Waldburg Lane.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Springfield

ROWS OF FADED GREY HOUSES, HUDDLED CLOSE TOgether and facing on narrow dirt lanes, house the population of Springfield, a Negro community lying west of Savannah near the city waterworks. In the neighborhood are several wooden churches of various denominations, a well constructed modern brick school building, and a number of stores that supply the six hundred odd Negroes of the community.

Many of the houses are shuttered, dim and quiet. So somber an atmosphere prevails that it is easy to imagine the spectral figures that the Negroes claim they see wandering at night along the twisting pathways. It is not surprising to be told of the sinister powers which are constantly at work and against which many inhabitants of this locality are always on guard.

A familiar figure in the neighborhood is James Washington,* famed locally as a fortune teller and root doctor. It is said that Washington's patronage is growing steadily; [22s. c. 48] each day new clients visit his dilapidated house, seeking advice or perhaps a cure for some puzzling ailment that has descended upon them.

The consulting room is smoky, airless, and reeking with a queer pungent odor. The shades are drawn down tightly, and when a visitor is being given advice the door is shut securely against intrusion. The furniture is scant, consisting of a lamp on a plain table, a couch for the visitor, and placed directly across the room a wooden armchair in which sits the dealer in magic. The most remarkable object in the room is

* *James Washington, Springfield.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

353 a "spirit picture," showing the head of one of the creatures of the "shadduh worl." The eyes are closed, the face bears a rapt, exalted expression, and the picture fades off into a dim mist of clouds.

791 Washington uses no cards or crystals. "I kin tell duh
787 fewchuh jis by lookin at duh pusson," [22a] * he told us, "cuz I wuz bawn wid a double cawl [4] wut wuz sabe fuh me till I wuz grown. Duh spirit show me ebryting. Ain many people hab duh powuh tuh see tings, but I got dis gif frum Gawd.

789 "I hab a deep knowledge uh magic. Deah's magic wut
754 gahd yuh frum hahm an deah's ebil magic wut kin put yuh down sick aw eben kill yuh.[8] Wen yuh bin fix, yuh caahn git well wid regluh medicine.[15] Yuh got tuh git a han gense duh fixin.[6] Magic roots hep a lots.[48] Duh haiah is one uh duh mos powful tings yuh enemy kin git hole ub [10] cuz it grow neah duh brain an a han made outuh haiah kin sho affec duh brain."

754 The credulous neighbors constantly seek Washington's
791 aid, for there is much talk of conjure among them. His recent acquittal on a charge of assault and robbery was interpreted as evidence that he possessed the ability to "fix duh cote so dey couldn nebuh sen im up."

754 We were told of a woman who had a spell cast upon her by
(593) her own sister.[15] Wishing to verify our information, we decided to pay the unfortunate victim a visit.

(351) The house stood at the dead end of a narrow street. A high wall separated it from its neighbors and the barren ground encircling it was littered with refuse, tin cans, and large piles of rocks. A fierce looking dog prowled restlessly near the high arched gateway and bared his teeth at the intruders. At our request a neighbor obligingly called over the fence to the sick woman,* who a moment later came limping towards us.

* *Ryna Bryant, Springfield.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

we would be woke up by a loud bangin noise. Ef we look out duh winduh we could see dis spirit. He wuz alluz wanduhin roun. Ebry now an den he would tro a rock at a ole gasoline tank an it would make dat noise we heah.[55] We alluz use tuh tink deah wuz buried treasure neah an dis spirit wuz gahdin it.[61] I nebuh did look fuh duh treasure, I dohn wahn tuh fool wid no spirits. Attuh a time dey tuk down duh house an duh spirit nebuh did come back no mo."

Another victim of conjure,* a Negro man of about eighty-eight, told us that although he did not usually believe superstitious tales, his own strange experience had forced him to realize that "folks kin fix yuh." "One time I fall down sick frum a puhculeyuh disease. Nuttn didn do no good till uh hab a root uhmun come in. Right away she tell me a enemy done put down a dose fuh me.[15] She say I wuz fined in fish. Well, den, she tell me tuh drink a haffuh pint uh wiskey and tro way duh udduh res uh duh pint. Attuh uh done dis, uh git well agen.[8]

"I knows a case uh fixin right now. It's a young man wut dohn lib fah frum yuh. He alluz complainin bout crickets crawlin unduh his skin an some uh duh neighbuhs say dey see um. I blieb dis mus be so cuz deah's a uhmun roun yuh wut kin make a han tuh put any kine uh insec in yuh body.[5] She kill duh insec an grine it tuh powduh an rub it on duh skin uh duh pusson aw gib it tuh um tuh drink. Wen it entuh duh body, it tun back intuh insec, sometime a lizud aw a frawg aw a snake."

The old man continued, "Ise had plenty sperience bout root wuk,[48] but I alluz try tuh keep way frum dat kine uh folks. I membuh ole Doctuh Sheppard who use tuh oppurate yuh. He hab hunduds uh folks come tuh him day an night. He mustuh been bery good.

"Deah wuz a uhmun name Clara an she wuz good too. She use tuh ketch lots uh Doctuh Sheppard's customuhs. I

* *Charles Singleton, Springfield.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

791 went tuh uh house once. She show me a box full uh packages
759 an she say dat ebry one wuz a han fuh diffrunt tings.[8b-c] I reach out tuh git hole ub em, but she stop me an say ef uh touch em, dey lose all duh powuh. Clara and Doctuh Sheppard bote dead now.

789 "Ise heahd lots uh stories bout folks wut could fly. Some time back I wuz libin in Woodville wen a man come tru deah. He wuz frum Liberty County. Dis man talk lot bout duh story uh duh Africans wut could fly. He say all dis wuz true. He say he wuz takin awduhs fuh wings an dey wuz all yuh need tuh fly. A peah uh wings coss twenty-five dolluhs. Duh man take yuh measure an a five dolluh deposit an say he collec duh balance wen he delibuh duh wings. Lots uh people gib deah awduh fuh wings, cuz all deah libes dey been heahin bout folks wut could fly. Duh man jis go roun takin awduhs an collectin five dolluhs. Das duh las any ub us ebuh heah uh duh man aw duh wings."

791 Clara Smith,* a resident of this community, told us that
759 she too remembered the time when Dr. Sheppard and the woman called Clara, who it appeared was her aunt, had operated a thriving business. "I didn unduhstan much wut dey did," she said, "but dey wuz bote kep busy all uh dat time. Deah wuz alluz a long line uh folks waitin tuh see em.

"Dey say my Aunt Clara wuz bery good. She could wuk roots an gib good luck hans an tell fawchuns, and fix yuh enemies.

754 "One time a man come an git muh aunt. He say somebody cunjuh his wife.[15] She ack queah an run away an stay fuh days at a time. My aunt go tuh duh house an dig all roun. She fine a sack filled wid sulphuh, an haiah,[10] an matches, an grabeyahd dut.[9] Den she look in duh house an she fine mo sacks in duh mattress, in duh pilluh, an in duh dressuh draws. Deze cunjuh sacks wuz wut causin duh woman tuh
[789] be crazy. My aunt destroy duh sacks an gie duh woman a

* *Clara Smith, 1159 East Duffy Street.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

754 with another woman * in the community, we again discussed the subject of conjure. This woman told us, "Deah's plenty cunjuh in dis neighbuhhood. Deah wuz a man and his wife libed yuh. Duh man couldn git wuk an he went away. Attuh he lef, duh wife wuz took sick; dey say she wuz cunjuhed,[15] an dey sen fuh duh huzbun. Wen he git home he git a root doctuh tuh visit uh.[48] Duh root man go tuh duh back step an dig a hole, an deah he fine nails an sulphuh an haiah an some grabeyahd dut. In duh pilluhs an mattresses an in duh dressuh draws, dey fine duh same ting. Dem tings run uh crazy. She ack queah an run away an stay fuh days at a time. Duh root doctuh moob duh cunjuh an she wuz cuod. He gie uh duh powuh tuh disappeah an appeah any time she want tuh. I heah bout lots uh folks wut kin disappeah lak dat. Duh ole folks use tuh tell bout duh people wut could take wing an fly right back tuh Africa.[49c]

755 789

"I alluz know deah wuz witches an ghos. Attuh I gits married muh huzbun tell me dat he sees ghos.[59] He describe duh ghos tuh me. It wuzn long fo I wuz seein duh ghos too. Sometime he would say tuh me, 'Deah go a spirit. It jis floatin long, ain got no head.' Sho nuff, deah I would see a shadduh floatin by me.

775 787

"Sometime muh huzbun see duh spirit uh some frien ub ours. Dat wuz a sho sign sumpm gwine happen tuh dat pusson, eeduh sickness aw det. One day he see a ghos ub a close frien uh his. Duh nex day he git a tiligram wut say duh frien wuz dead.

763

"I knowd folks dat wuz witches; dey nebuh bodduhed me but jis picked on muh huzbun. Ain a night hahdly pass wen dey ain ride im.[60] Deah wuz a uhmun libed on duh same street we did. We use tuh call uh An Sally, duh cunjuh uhmun. She could tell fawchuns[22] an gib hans[8c, d] an fix yuh enemies fuh yuh. She ain seem tuh like muh huzbun. Ef she pass our house durin duh day, dat night she come an

754 791

754

* *Dorothy Johnson, 1201 Murphy Avenue.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

115
533
539

BROWNVILLE

Kum baba yano
Lai lai tambe
Ashi lai lai lai
Shi wali go
Dhun.

•791 In the heart of the thriving Brownville community live
759 fortune tellers, root doctors, and vendors of magic charms
789 who conduct flourishing businesses.[22a, c, 48] There is a ready market for their wares which are used for the various activities of daily living. Numerous perplexities pertaining to matters of business, luck, and love affairs are thought to be solved by the mere possession of certain charms.[8]

115 Mattie Sampson,* a robust young Negro woman, told us
789 that she does an active mail order business as representative
472 of the Lucky Heart Company, the Sweet Georgia Brown Company, and the Curio Products Company. She supports herself comfortably by means of selling her credulous neighbors good luck perfumes, roots, lodestones, and similar charms. "Duh chahms an good luck puhfumes an powduhs do deah wuk independent of any additional hep," Mattie said. "Ef anybody believe a puticuluh chahm is wut dey need, well, dat chahm will do duh wuk."

"Mos of muh customuhs depen on special chahms tuh bring em good luck," the young woman continued. "Dey nevuh puhmit deah supply tuh give out but awduh it ovuh an ovuh. I have sevral bes selluhs. One is duh *Mystic Mojo Love Sachet*. Dis is sometimes call *Quick Love Powduh* an is guaranteed tuh make yuh populuh, successful, an happy. Yuh use it tuh attrac a pusson an tuh make dat pusson admyuh an love yuh. A lill uh dis powduh is wone in a bag aroun duh neck aw rubbed on duh body. But ef yuh prefuh, yuh kin sprinkle it in duh dressuh draw aw in duh bottom uh duh shoes.

* *Mattie Sampson, West 32nd Street.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

115 of schooling as evinced by her diction. She is a devout member of the Adventist Church, her day of worship coming on Saturday instead of the customary Sunday, a day observed and anticipated by the average Negro.

•791 "Silvia Higgins," Esther testified, "wuz a medium. She
795 talked with spirits all huh life.[66a, b] She used the rapping signal. I myself have seen the work and acts of spirits. I've seen cheahs and tables move about a room. And I've seen a woman and a boy come intuh my yahd and then disappeah, and I know that the woman wuz dead. The boy wuz not dead but wuz not anywheah in this vicinity. Silvia Higgins wuz my mothuh. She has been dead thirty-two yeahs."

115 One of the most interesting Negroes in this settlement is Tonie Houston,* an old preacher, extremely gracious of manner and eager to be of help.

"I bin yuh in dis town fo dey wuz no big buildings an duh streets wuz all dut an deah wuz no pavement."

829 "Do you remember any of the people brought over from Africa?" we asked.

(551) "Yas, I know heaps ub um. Deah wuz 'Golla' John Wiley, Golla' Jim Bayfield—he wuz bought by Mahse Chahles Lamar, and he sole im to Mr. McMullen. Den deah wuz 'Golla' Jack, 'Golla' Tom, 'Golla' Silvie, 'Golla' Chahles Carr, 'Golla' Bob, Chahlotte, Cain, an Jeanette, an 'Golla' Alice. Dey wuz all bought by Mr. McMullen."

(101) When asked the meaning of so many "Gollas," he replied, "All duh people wut come frum Africa aw obuhseas wuz call 'Golla,' and dey talk wuz call 'Golla' talk." His knowl-
(192) edge of their language, gained by association with the Africans, was scant. Among the words he remembered were *musungo* tobacco, *mulafo* whiskey, and *sisure* chicken. A cow was called *gombay* [25s] and a hog *gulluh*.

(322) To questions regarding the utensils, such as buckets, tubs,

* *Tonie Houston, Tatemville.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

duh seamstress fuh duh slabes. She make mos all dey weah."

When we asked her if she ever heard that dreaming about a snake "meant anything," the old woman replied, "Yes, ma'am, dat mean yuh got a enemy.[51] Not many nights ago I dream bout a snake an uh sho wuz sked wen uh wake up."

They both laughed and Susie leaned over and tapped Sophie on the arm and said, "Oh yes, deah's lots uh dem tings bout babies. Wen dey bawn wid a caul, das sho a sign dey will be bery wise an kin talk wid duh spirits.[4] Ain dasso, Sophie?"

Agreeing, Sophie hastened to add what she had heard about babies born with teeth. "Dey will hab bad luck all deah libes.[66] Dat sho wuk out. Deah wuz one boy bawn dat way wut lib right yuh in Wite Bluff an he wine up by bein in duh chain-gang an dat sho nuff bad luck."

"But dis lill plant heah called 'Cherokee' is spose tuh bring good luck ef yuh plants it by duh front doe step,"[34a] said Susie.

In this community as in many others strangers are not allowed to be buried in the local cemetery but in what is known as the "strangers lot," a piece of ground set apart from the cemetery proper. The custom of bringing the dead back to their original home for interment is also prevalent throughout coastal Georgia. The body of a young man who recently died in New York was brought back to White Bluff for burial. Relative to this custom, Susie spoke quietly. "Dey alluz brings um back tuh bury um ef dey kin git duh money, cuz yuh see duh spirit'll jis wanduh roun an nebuh be satisfied lessn it brung back home tuh be buried."[1]

"I know Lunnon Grayson know all bout dem tings too. Yuh tun off tuh duh lef at duh fus road leadin off frum duh highway yuh. Ax anybody den, an dey'll tell yuh wich is his house. He use tuh lib on St. Catherines too, but he come up yuh long fo me an Susie," Sophie said.

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

SANDFLY

791 In a section of Sandfly known as Baker's Crossing lives Ophelia Baker, better known as Madam Truth, professed fortune teller and clairvoyant. The woman's sober attire and her modern attractive house give little evidence of her profession. When holding a seance, however, her whole appearance undergoes a change; her body becomes tense and jerks spasmodically; her dark eyes roll wildly. Of her ability in her chosen field the medium says, "I advise on business an love affeahs. I tell good an bad nooz comin tuh yuh. Deah's a remedy fuh ebry trouble an I hab dat remedy, fuh a spirit hab brung it tuh me."[22a]

791 794 783 Madam Truth, a member of the Holy Sanctified Church of Sandfly, said that all members must undergo a sanctifying process in order to be saved. After this has been accomplished members claim to be able to hear, from a great distance, singing, talking, and the sounding of drums. We [533] were told that the beating of the drums has a special significance, but that was all we could learn on the subject; we were told that this was a secret, divulged only to members.

794 262 Members of the church are forbidden to eat certain kinds of fish and also cabbage, lettuce, and other green vegetables. The reason they give is that they have received a warning from the spirits that it is unwise to eat these foods.[25]

791 533 202 The plump, dark-skinned fortune teller said that she had spent her childhood on Skidaway Island. She remembered hearing the drums beaten to tell the people in the nearby settlements of an approaching dance or festival. Her father had been one of those who beat the drum and thumped out a regular message on it, a message that could be heard for miles and was clearly understood by all those who had heard it.[26]

764 [782] The woman also remembered wakes which had been held on Skidaway. Coffee and sandwiches were served the mourners, each one of whom poured some of the coffee on the ground for the spirit of the deceased.[27b, 28b]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Islanders have delineated this three-part concept very precisely. It was described to me by a very religious Sea Island man as follows:

> Listen to me good now: when you die in this world, you see, the . . . the . . . the . . . soul of a man go home to the Kingdom of God, but your spirit still's here on earth. . . . And if you was . . . the devil in all your days . . . your spirit, after you dead, your spirit can do the same thing. Your soul up there, but your spirit de right down de here with the body. . . . And that's the one gone . . . gone do the effect to you. You see now . . . now that's, that's why I say this now. A lot of people don't believe. Say, say . . . say is not ghost. Is ghost there.

The "dream spirit," this man continued, must be permitted periodically to take leave of the body and roam. It therefore leaves the body and wanders all over the world when one goes to sleep. The body is unprotected while the spirit is away, however, and if the spirit should come in contact with a second, evil spirit while it is roaming, it must race back to the body. When this happens, the person may cry out in sleep and become frightened; if the spirit does not come back to the body, the person dies in sleep.[49]

Another distinctive element in the islanders' world view is their belief in voodoo, or hoodoo. This belief involves rituals whereby spirits, good or evil, are conjured up to offer predictions, kill enemies, or perform cures for problems ranging from broken hearts, infertility, and rheumatism to mental illness and cancer. The spirit of one's ancestors is considered the closest link to the spirits of the "other" world. Thus, on the Sea Islands as well as in Africa, spirits are asked to intervene on behalf of a living relative. The belief in voodoo is still so strong in the Sea Island area that Dr. Buzzard, a known practitioner of the occult, maintained a high standard of living from reading signs, effecting certain cures, and appealing to the spirits.

The islanders set great store on preparation for burial and consider it an abomination to die without having made the necessary financial arrangements to be buried at home. Thus some islanders pay on burial policies all of their lives. By tradition a parent starts a burial policy for each child that is born, paying twenty-five to fifty cents per month until the policy is paid in full. It may take one's whole life to pay for all the policies. When the children reach a certain age, the parents usually ask

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Thus, diviners combined physical, religious, and psychological approaches in their treatments. Perhaps in instances where a physical cure was warranted herbal medicines sufficed. But when a patient was convinced that superhuman agencies were at the root of the problem, a diviner resorted to similar countermeasures of supernatural proportions, and it was a case of spirit acting upon spirit. Patients with faith enough in their specialists, priests, or priestesses might be relieved of a spell they felt in the grip of, "cured" of a psychosomatic complaint, or the healer might even employ an effective herbal remedy while prescribing an amulet, in which case the two powers working together were credited with effecting a cure.[23]

African diviners were specialists who usually considered themselves "called" to their positions, either as youths or later in life. The profession was also passed on within the family. The nature of the "calling" was generally through dreams in which deities or ancestors summoned a would-be diviner to the work. The training process was extensive and candidates were schooled in medicinal knowledge, magic, and witchcraft countermeasures. In the Upper and Lower Guinea regions, mandatory secret societies assumed the task of training religious specialists and the process took place over a number of years in which candidates were isolated from everyone except other initiates and teachers. Among ethnic groups of the Kongo, medicine specialists were sometimes trained in special secret societies. The class of diviners was elaborate (with over fifty orders), since BaKongo religion was solidly based on magico-healing (*minkisi*). Yet a "proper specialist" or *nganga* need not necessarily belong to any society.[24]

Functions of spiritual leaders and diviners were of paramount significance in the New World setting. In the colonial era these leaders most likely provided a direct link with and representation of the past. Later they demonstrated the African-American adaptive capacity as they incorporated their influence into the Christian religion as well as sometimes operating completely outside of it. In the early days, when memories and reminiscences of Africa were fresh, African diviners assumed religious leadership. From this group may have emerged the "spiritual parents"—men and women whose position was unauthorized by whites, but central to the slaves' spiritual and religious orientation. Their existence predated the coming of organized Christian instruction to the Sea Islands. Yet they became the Gullahs' plenipotentiaries, responsible for

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

guiding potential Christian converts through the "seekin' " experience just as Poro and Sande leaders conducted the neophytes through the "bush" experience.[25]

A second group of leaders worked on the periphery of Christianity. These "doctors" or "conjurers" were highly regarded by Africans and by African-Americans tied to their past while also creating a present. Some resembled the African specialists, in Kikongo the *nganga*, practitioners of *minkisi*. Yet others practiced *kindoki*, and brought evil. For if *Nzambi* and the ancestors set the limits of human possibility, and gave humans countermeasures against catastrophic forces, this influence was not always successful. The sorcerer *ndoki* brought chaos, disorder, sterilization of nature, and even death. Hence we fine among the Gullahs the belief in conjuration and in witches of human form who brought evil via mystical actions, and in root "doctors" and healers who worked for the forces of good.

As Christianity crusaded through the slave quarters during the last generation bondage, another type of major leadership is identified as having a commanding influence upon the Gullahs. These plantation meeting house elders, chosen by whites, were the last group to develop. As spiritual parents, root doctors, and conjurers were a bridge between old and new traditions, with accentuation of the former, the "praise house watchmen" were the embodiment of creative forces that congealed past and present into something exceptional. But the new leadership, unlike the old, was probably more definitely in alignment with the new religion. Still black elders were pillars of strength in the slave quarters, and often above reproach among the members of the socioreligious communities.[26]

Association with African traditions obviously weakened, first in wake of new circumstances and later due to the power and appeal of the new religion. Yet while many elements of Africanity disappeared, other beliefs and customs took on new forms. Some features basic to traditional experience and thought outlived the capture, homeland enslavement, Middle Passage, and Protestant influence. African religious orientation was fundamental to early ethnic groups brought to the Sea Islands and coastal Lowcountry. Additionally, in the process of community-building, a cosmology significant in traditional African societies formed another basis of the Gullah world view and spirituality. A sacred concept of reality and of the universe not only explained natural and supernatural phenomena for Africans, but fashioned notions about human relation-

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

code of the society could be imposed upon leaders by society members. The zo were the principal characters in the society, and were charged with protecting the traditions and institutions of the group. The zo people had a "majestic status." They were respected by chiefs and elders, and "honored with intense devotion by the youth of the land." In personal characteristics a zo was "chivalrous, courteous, public spirited, law-abiding and fearless." The zo was also a teacher of "native lore, arts, and crafts." He or she had full knowledge of the history and traditions of the people. Above all, the zo were "authentic" judges of all matters pertaining to the people's welfare.[26]

As role models these African leaders correspond to some extent with Gullah elders. But there is an even closer relation between zo and Gullah spiritual parents to whom the slaves looked for guidance and who maintained such "absolute authority" over them. Laura Towne wrote:

> I went to-day to see Maum Katie, an old African woman who remembers worshipping her own gods in Africa but who has been nearly a century in this country. She is bright and talkative, a great "spiritual mother," a fortune teller, or rather prophetess, and a woman of tremendous influence over her spiritual children.

Similarly, Harriet Ware was acquainted with "Old Peggy, the 'leader' from Fripp Point." Ware was told that "Old Peggy and Binah" were the two "whom all that came into the Church, had come through, and the Church supports (takes care of) them." Thus the Methodist missionary correctly assessed the role and power of women diviners in Gullah church membership. A further example of female influence in the sacred-secular world of slaves is provided by Francis Kemble. An old woman on the Butler plantations named Sinda, reigned as a prophetess among the slaves for many years and acquired as ascendency over them. When she declared the world would soon end, "her assertion took such possession of the people on the estate that they refused to work, and the rice and cotton fields were threatened with an indefinite fallow in consequence of this strike on the part of the cultivators." The overseer, realizing the impossibility of attempting force, waited until the appointed day arrived. Sinda' prediction proved false and no emancipation was forthcoming. The people went back to work and Sinda, in a fallen state, was "tremendously flogged."[27]

It is difficult to discern where one type of socioreligious leadership

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

APPENDIX E

Gullah Folkways

177 178 Because they occupied a position of servitude, the Gullahs had to accept outwardly, points of view, customs, and beliefs to which they were exposed by the dominant society. Nevertheless, through subtlety and secretiveness they were able to retain some of their previously held beliefs and practices. After slavery, the Gullahs were occasionally willing to share some of their beliefs, customs, and "superstitions" with those readily identifiable as friends, or with those who would not censure the Gullahs for their ways of thinking. Thus a wealth of information about Gullah culture was collected from various sources, but particularly by WPA workers. The following information related to Gullah folk religion and supernatural beliefs provides a mere sample of the material. Unless otherwise stated, this information on Gullah folk beliefs was taken from the WPA files at the South Carolina Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia. Although more research is needed in this area, it was nevertheless possible to trace some of these beliefs to African origins.

127 128 178

Folk Beliefs

775 856 828 Spirits show themselves to babies more often than to grown people. When babies smile or cry out in their sleep, it is because some spirit is amusing or troubling them.

764 789 If there is a baby in a house of death, pass the baby over the coffin. This will prevent the spirit from returning to trouble the baby.

845 791 787 People born with a caul or veil over their faces are supposed to have strange powers, to foretell the future, see spirits, etc.[a]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

17
113 *Peoples of Africa* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 450–52, 458; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Custom and Government in the Lower Kongo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 84; Laman, *Kongo* II: 130–31; Balandier, *Daily Life in Kongo*, 246–47.

19. Laman, *Kongo*, II: 22–23; Balandier, *Daily Life in Kongo*, 217–20, 246–57; Willoughby, *Soul of Bantu*, 71, 77–82, 315; Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 158–71.

171 20. Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 266–68, 278; Laman, *Kongo*, II: 92; MacGaffey, *Custom*
113 *in Lower Kongo*, 148–50; Willoughby, *Soul of Bantu*, 86; Opoku, *West African Religion*, 36–39; Amponsah, *Topics on African Traditional Religion*, 86; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, 30–33; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958; repr. from 1941 ed.), 206; Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 106, 161; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments*
791 *of the Sun*, 181–203; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 132–58; John M. Vlach, *The Afro-*
795 *American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 139–47; Elizabeth A. Fenn, "Honoring the Ancestors; Kongo-American Graves in the American South," *Southern Exposure* 28 (September–October, 1985): 42–57; "Notes and Documents; Antebellum and War Memories of Mrs. Telfair Hodgson," Sarah Hodgson Torian, ed., *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (December, 1953): 352; Albert H. Stoddard, "Origin, Dialect, Beliefs and Characteristics of the Negroes of the South Carolina and Georgia Coasts," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 28 (September, 1944): 181–93; Irving E. Lowrey, *Life on the Old Plantation* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1911), 81–86; South Carolina Folklore Project, #1655, D-4-27A, WPA, SCL: Folk-Lore Scrap-Book, "Mortuary Customs and Beliefs of South Carolina Negroes," from an article originally published in the *Atlanta Constitution* by May A. Waring, *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 7 (1894): 318–19.

171 21. Opoku, *West African Religion*, 147–51; Amponsah, *Topics on African Traditional Reli-*
113 *gion*, 80–84; Parsons, *Religion in an African Society*, 50–55, 71–72, 186; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, Chapter 4; Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 211–213; Balandier, *Daily Life in Kongo*, 248–50; Laman, *Kongo* III: 81–104; Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 214–20, 232–35; Willoughby, *Soul of Bantu*, 192–95; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 37; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 106–7, 117–19; E. J. Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," *Century* 41 (November–April, 1890–91): 825–26.

22. Parsons, *Religion in an African Society*, 50–55, 71–72, 186; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, Chapter 4; Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 211–13; Laman, *Kongo*, III: 57, 81–104, 157–59; Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 231–36; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 110–14; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 106–7, 117–21; Janzen and MacGaffey, *Kongo Religion*, 34–35; Mbiti, *African Religions*, 169, Chapters 15–16.

23. Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 213–14; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, 54–59; Rattray, *Religion in Ashanti*, 148–49; Mbiti, *African Religions*, 168–171, Chapters 15–16; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 37; Janzen and MacGaffey, *Kongo Religion*, 34–35; Laman, *Kongo*, III: 81–105.

24. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 166–67, Rattray, *Religion in Ashanti*, 38–39; Parsons, *Religion in an African Society*, 71–72; Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 211; Folkways Research Series, *History of Gola Tribe*, II: 22–23; Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," 824–29; Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 214–18; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 37, 110; Laman, *Kongo*, II: 130–32.

• [791] 25. *SCA*, June 26, 1840, June 26, 1843, October 30, 1847; *Minutes; Beaufort Baptist Church*, "Origin of the Colored Societies," October 7, 1859, Business Meeting in which organization of societies was discussed, 271–72, January 7, 1842 and November 1, 1840, 12, BC; *SCA*, Diary of Laura M. Towne, 52, 162, Penn School Papers, SHC; John L. Field to George W. Moore, March 21, 1833, HSSCC.